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Miss Deborah's Pocketbook

Alice C. Thompson

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226 S. 11th Street, Philadelphia

Miss Deborah's Pocketbook

A Play in One Act

BY

Alice C. Thompson

Author of "The Good Old Days," "A Suffragette
Baby," "Molly's Way," etc.



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Miss Deborah's Pocketbook

CHARACTERS

MISS DEBORAH HOLLIS, THE ELDER.

MRS. HORNER.

MISS PHŒBE GREY.

ANNIE.

DEBORAH HOLLIS, THE YOUNGER.

PHŒBE HOLLIS.

TIME.—Thirty minutes.

STORY OF THE PLAY

How a dimity gown and destiny decidedly changed the views of a wealthy and proud maiden lady, living in a small town, is set forth in this simple, but effective, little play. Miss Deborah Hollis is visited by two ladies seeking subscriptions on a day on which she has lost a large sum of money, and is also greatly annoyed by the fact that a poor family has just moved in next door. She gives generously to buy a present for the prominent president of her club, but meagerly to the Home Missionary Society. In the midst of her denouncement of the poor, a young girl, one of the new neighbors, appears with the lost money. She proves to be the daughter of Miss Hollis' long-lost brother, and Miss Deborah changes her mind about beggars, and finds a namesake.

COSTUMES, ETC.

MISS HOLLIS. About fifty-five. A woman of fine features and an aristocratic bearing. She is well, but plainly, dressed.

MRS. HORNER. A prosperous, well-dressed matron of about fifty. Calling costume.

MISS PHŒBE GREY. A gentle little maiden lady in an old-fashioned and rather shabby dress and hat. About sixty.

ANNIE. A pleasant-faced girl of twenty. She wears a neat gingham dress, cap, and white apron.

DEBORAH, THE YOUNGER. A tall pale girl of about eighteen, who would be pretty if she had a chance. She wears a faded but clean black and white gingham dress, and no hat. She carries a black shopping bag in her hand at entrance.

PHŒBE HOLLIS. A bright, pretty girl of sixteen. She wears a faded mauve dimity dress and no hat. Any other dress may be worn, by making slight changes in the text, where the dress is mentioned.

PROPERTIES

Sofa cushions; a black leather hand-bag containing pocketbook with roll of bills; hand-bag containing small note-book and pencil.

Miss Deborah's Pocketbook

SCENE.—*Parlor in MISS DEBORAH'S house, furnished in comfortable and old-fashioned style. A large sofa, L. C. Armchair, R. C. Table and two small chairs, C. Entrances C. and down L. and R. Door C. opens into front hall. The front door may or may not be shown beyond door C.*

(The curtain rises to discover ANNIE searching the room. She turns up the sofa cushions, goes down on her hands and knees, looking under sofa and chairs.)

ANNIE (*speaking off L.*). No, ma'am, I can't find it; it's not here. I've looked everywhere. (*Rises.*) Yes'm, I did look all over the grounds, right down to the gate.

(Bell at C. ANNIE goes up and admits, C., MISS PHÆBE GREY.)

PHÆBE G. Good-afternoon, Annie. Is Miss Hollis at home?

ANNIE (*hesitating*). Yes, Miss Grey, she is, but—I don't know if she'd see visitors jest now.

PHÆBE G. (*smiling*). Oh, but I'm not a visitor. And I'll stay only a minute. (*Comes down C.*) Is she so busy?

ANNIE. No'm, but she's lost her hand-bag with a lot of money in it.

PHÆBE G. Now, that is unfortunate.

ANNIE. Miss Hollis went to town this morning and called at the bank, and she says she remembers she had it in her hand as far as the front door. But we've looked everywhere.

PHÆBE G. Perhaps I'd better be going —

(A ring C.)

ANNIE. Oh, I hope they've found it. (*Opens door.*)

(Enter MRS. HORNER, C.)

MRS. H. Is Miss Hollis at home, Annie?

ANNIE. Yes, Mrs. Horner, but——

MRS. H. Tell her I am here. (*Comes down c.*) How do you do, Phœbe?

PHŒBE G. How are you, Blanche?

MISS DEBORAH HOLLIS (*off L.*). Annie, Annie!

ANNIE. Yes'm, I'm coming.

(*Exit, L.*)

MRS. H. I didn't know you were coming over this afternoon, Phœbe.

(*They sit R. c.*)

PHŒBE G. I'm—I'm collecting, you know. For the Home Missionary Band.

MRS. H. Oh, that's the society you gave that pretty new dimity dress to last summer.

PHŒBE G. Yes, it's a year ago.

MRS. H. You might better have kept it. It was a foolish sacrifice on your part.

PHŒBE G. I never regretted it, and I hope it gave pleasure to some one. But I'm afraid I was a little egotistical. I wrote on a piece of paper, "From a lady in Greenbridge," and slipped it into the dress.

MRS. H. Much they care who the things come from—those people! Well, I've come to see Deborah on important business.

PHŒBE G. I expect it'll have to wait. Annie says Deborah has lost her hand-bag with her pocketbook in it.

MRS. H. Lost her hand-bag! Well, how unlucky for me. The idea of its happening to-day, of all days! Still, she could give me a check. Where did she lose it?

PHŒBE G. Somewhere in or near the house, she thinks.

MRS. H. H'm—do they leave the front door open?

PHŒBE G. I don't know. Why?

MRS. H. Those shabby-looking people who have just moved into the Green cottage—they're so poor and down at heels. Strangers, too. And right at Deborah's front gate. It would be very easy for one of them to slip in.

PHŒBE G. But just because people are poor we should not conclude that they are dishonest, should we?

MRS. H. Well, they look it.

PHŒBE G. I passed the eldest girl this morning. Somehow she made me think of Dick Hollis. Or perhaps I was thinking of him, anyway.

MRS. H. Deborah's brother?

PHŒBE G. Yes, the one who left home twenty years ago. He has never been back, and they have never heard from him since. Mr. Hollis was hard on him.

MRS. H. Deborah always takes her father's part, and the boy drank.

PHŒBE G. Yes, poor Dick. He was too popular for his own good, and had too much spending money. And then they cast him off without a penny.

MRS. H. Here's Deborah.

(Enter DEBORAH HOLLIS, the elder, L.)

DEBORAH. Good-afternoon, Blanche and Phœbe. How are you?

PHŒBE G. I hope you are well, Deborah.

DEBORAH. I'm well, thanks. But I'm considerably upset in my mind. I've lost my hand-bag with a hundred dollars in it.

PHŒBE G. A hundred dollars!

DEBORAH. Yes; I drew it out of the bank this morning, thinking to go to the city to-morrow and do some shopping. We've searched the house all over and can't find it. There's no one here but myself and Annie, and she's—well, as honest as I am. *(Sits.)*

MRS. H. Did any one get into the house?

DEBORAH. I don't think so. There have been no strangers around, except those people in the old Green cottage. The idea of any one letting an old tumble-down place like that! And to a shiftless, poverty-stricken family! Why, to see their washing hanging out it's just——

PHŒBE G. Yes, it's just pitiful.

DEBORAH. And they have a horrid, vicious dog, too. He followed Annie into our yard yesterday and almost attacked her.

MRS. H. Yes, I noticed it as I came past. They'll bear watching, I guess. How many are there in the family?

PHŒBE G. Only three, I think; a mother and two daughters. We shouldn't judge everybody by the size of his pocketbook. You know folks do come down in the

world. Sickness and poverty could bring them to just such a pass.

DEBORAH. Nonsense, Phœbe. Blood will tell. Decent folk couldn't live like that. They're just driftwood, that's all; just human driftwood.

PHŒBE G. Suppose they are? Then we've got to do something for them. Every one can't be prosperous and successful. Hardly one of us but has had some close and dear relative who's made a failure of his life.

DEBORAH. I know you mean Dick. But I washed my hands of him twenty years ago, when he went away defying my father. But you always took his part, Phœbe.

PHŒBE G. We—we were always good friends.

DEBORAH. Don't mention his name to me any more. He's—he's nothing to me now. He may be dead, for all I know—or care.

PHŒBE G. Oh, Deborah!

DEBORAH. As for those people in the Green house, they can't stay on there, in that tumble-down place. It's an eyesore.

MRS. H. Deborah's right. We ought to send them back where they belong. There ought to be some law to stop poor, shiftless folk coming from one state to another and being a burden on the community.

PHŒBE G. But have they asked any one for anything?

MRS. H. Not yet, but the town will be supporting them before long, you'll see.

(A noise and loud voices off L.)

DEBORAH *(rising)*. What's that?

(Enter ANNIE, L.)

ANNIE. Oh, Miss Hollis, that horrid black dog is in the yard again. I'm scared to go out. And he's ram-pagin' all over the flower beds.

DEBORAH. I'll settle him.

(Exeunt ANNIE and DEBORAH, C. MRS. H. goes up C.)

MRS. H. There he is! I wouldn't dare go out,

(PHŒBE G. goes up C.)

PHŒBE G. Here's Deborah with a broom,

MRS. H. And Annie with a rake. I should think they'd want to shoot him. Look at the sweet peas!

PHŒBE G. And the geraniums. It is a shame!

MRS. H. My word! Deborah came down hard on his back. Just hear him! He's gone out, across to his own dirty yard.

(They come down c.)

PHŒBE G. Poor Deborah is having her troubles.

MRS. H. Yes, we've happened in on a bad day. And whatever made you go and talk about Dick Hollis?

PHŒBE G. I didn't mention him first. But I'm not afraid to say what I think, Blanche.

MRS. H. We'll have to smooth her down now.

(Reënter DEBORAH and ANNIE, c. Exit ANNIE, l.)

DEBORAH *(in a temper)*. This is the last straw. I'll have them arrested. All my geraniums and sweet peas broken down by that dog. I'll certainly get the police after them.

MRS. H. It's a perfect shame. Don't be imposed upon, Deborah. You are too good-natured. I wish I could help you. But I really must be going. I called to see you about the Saturday Reading Club. We are going to present our retiring president, Mrs. Hawtrey, with a silver-mounted traveling bag. And I knew you'd want to give something. She thinks so much of you.

DEBORAH. Of course I will. But isn't that rather an expensive gift?

MRS. H. Oh, we couldn't give less. She's going to Europe, you know.

DEBORAH. You can put me down for five dollars.

MRS. H. Oh, thanks. By check?

DEBORAH. No, you'll have to wait until I find my money, Blanche.

(MRS. H. takes a small note-book and pencil from her hand-bag.)

MRS. H. Mrs. Simpson gave eight dollars.

DEBORAH. She did, eh? Mrs. Simpson — Humph, I guess that'll run her close with the housekeeping for a week or so. You can make my subscription eight, too.

MRS. H. Oh, thank you, dear. (*Writes in book.*) We'll be able to get a lovely bag.

PHŒBE G. I was going to ask you for a small sum for the Home Missionary Society, Deborah.

MRS. H. Did you know that Mrs. Hawtrey is a cousin to the governor?

DEBORAH. Is that so? I didn't know it.

PHŒBE G. (*meekly*). She's just a third cousin.

MRS. H. (*going up c.*). Good-bye, Deborah. I'll come back for the money. I hope you find it soon. Just keep your eye on those people across the way.

DEBORAH. Oh, Blanche (MRS. H. *turns*), perhaps you had better put down ten dollars to my name.

MRS. H. Deborah, you are the most generous woman in Greenbridge. I'll put it down before I forget it. (*Takes book out of bag and writes in it.*) Ah, what a lot of good you do, Deborah! Good-bye.

DEBORAH. Good-bye, Blanche.

(*Exit MRS. H., c.*)

PHŒBE G. Our little Home Missionary Society, you know, Deborah, looks after Indians and poor white settlers in the west.

DEBORAH (*impatently*). Oh, more driftwood.

PHŒBE G. Call them driftwood if you like. Even driftwood has its uses, and for all we know the destiny of these poor people may be as important as yours and mine.

DEBORAH. Destiny is a big word to apply to them.

PHŒBE G. Last year we sent out sixteen barrels of clothing. And one hundred dollars besides.

DEBORAH. Yes, I know. You gave them a good dimity dress that you'd worn only twice. You might better have kept it for this summer.

PHŒBE G. I felt I must do something—I have so little money. And I'm glad I sent the dress, if it has given any one a little happiness.

DEBORAH. I can't pretend to have much sympathy with poor shiftless folk. I'll give you a dollar, though.

PHŒBE G. (*disappointed*). Thank you, Deborah. (*Rises.*) I do hope you'll find your hand-bag and your pocketbook.

(*Enter ANNIE, L.*)

ANNIE. Miss Hollis, there's a young girl would like to speak to you.

DEBORAH. Who is it? I'm not in the humor to see any one. What's her name?

ANNIE. She didn't give her name, but I think she belongs to that family over the way.

DEBORAH. Humph—probably begging. Well, show her in. Don't go, Phœbe, for a minute. (*Exit ANNIE, L.*) I'll tell her if they don't get their front yard cleaned, and chain up that dog I'll —

PHŒBE G. You won't be too hard on her, Deborah. It's not her fault.

DEBORAH. Hush, here she is.

(*PHŒBE G. sits on sofa. Enter C., DEBORAH HOLLIS, the younger. In her hand she carries a black hand-bag. She comes down C.*)

DEBORAH H. I found this bag just beside your gate. Does it belong to you?

DEBORAH (*with a little cry*). Oh, my bag! Yes, yes, it is mine. I have been looking all over for it. (*Takes it.*) Oh, I'm so glad it's found.

PHŒBE G. Oh, Deborah, what good fortune!

DEBORAH. You live across the road in the cottage, don't you? When did you find my bag?

DEBORAH H. This morning.

DEBORAH. This morning? It is four o'clock now. And I have been worried nearly to death. There is a hundred dollars in it.

DEBORAH H. (*gravely*). Is there? That's a great deal of money; more than I've ever seen in my life.

DEBORAH. Why didn't you bring it back before?

DEBORAH H. I couldn't come before.

DEBORAH. Couldn't come? And you live only a step away!

DEBORAH H. But I really couldn't come. I—I —

(*DEBORAH looks at PHŒBE G. and nods her head meaningly.*)

PHŒBE G. Probably there was a very good reason.

DEBORAH (*giving bag to PHŒBE G.*). Take out what I promised you, Phœbe, and please count the money.

DEBORAH H. I will tell you why I couldn't come. My

only good dress was soiled. I had to wash and iron it, for mother said I must look neat to come over here.

(PHCEBE G. *opens bag and looks over the roll of bills inside as inconspicuously as possible.*)

DEBORAH. Is that your best dress?

DEBORAH H. (*looking down*). The best—I have.

PHCEBE G. There's a hundred dollars here, Deborah. You didn't drop one out.

DEBORAH. I'll give you a reward, of course.

DEBORAH H. Oh, no—no; I won't take anything.

DEBORAH. But it was very honest of you to bring the bag back as you found it.

DEBORAH H. Honest? What else could I do? I belong to honest people.

DEBORAH. What is your name?

DEBORAH H. Deborah Hollis.

DEBORAH (*rising*). What do you mean? Who are you? Where do you come from? Tell me your name again.

DEBORAH H. (*puzzled*). Deborah Hollis is my name.

PHCEBE G. Is it possible——

DEBORAH. Your father's name—tell me, what is it?

DEBORAH H. My father's name was Richard Annersley Hollis.

PHCEBE G. (*rising*). Dick's daughter.

DEBORAH. Where is he?

DEBORAH H. He is dead. (*She looks puzzled.*)

DEBORAH. Dead! Dick dead! (*Sits.*)

PHCEBE G. (*sitting suddenly*). Dead!

DEBORAH H. (*going to her*). You knew my father——?

DEBORAH. Don't you know who I am?

DEBORAH H. No.

DEBORAH. My name is Deborah Hollis.

DEBORAH H. Why, why—then you're——

DEBORAH. Your father's sister. You must have known his home was in Greenbridge.

DEBORAH H. Oh, no, we did not. My father never mentioned his home. We only knew he came from this state.

DEBORAH. Then why did you come to Greenbridge?

DEBORAH H. It is rather a strange story. I will tell you.

(Enter MRS. H., C.)

MRS. H. Phoebe—Phoebe—Deborah, what do you think?

DEBORAH. Yes, we know, Blanche.

MRS. H. But where did she get it?

DEBORAH. She found it at the gate.

MRS. H. Oh, nonsense. Why, you sent it out west a year ago, Phoebe.

PHŒBE G. What do you mean?

MRS. H. Your mauve dimity dress, of course. I'd known it anywhere.

PHŒBE G. My mauve dimity dress! What ever is the matter, Blanche? You know I sent it out west a year ago.

MRS. H. (*triumphantly*). Then why is it on a young girl just outside? Tell me that.

PHŒBE G. On a young girl—

DEBORAH H. That's my sister. Her name is Phoebe.

DEBORAH. Well, this is extraordinary. Tell her to come in, Deborah. Blanche, this is my niece, Deborah Hollis.

PHŒBE G. Dick's daughter.

MRS. H. What—no!

(DEBORAH H. *goes up c.*)

DEBORAH H. (*softly*). Phoebe, come in.

DEBORAH. She is like Dick; it's marvelous.

PHŒBE G. His eyes, his very walk.

DEBORAH. What did I say to you? Blood will tell.

DEBORAH H. (*coming down c.*). A year ago when we were out west—it was shortly after my father died—we were very poor; all our money had gone to pay doctors' bills. We were obliged to accept help; among other things some clothing. It was marked, "From a lady in Greenbridge."

PHŒBE G. What do you mean?

DEBORAH. Go on.

DEBORAH H. Mother said, "There must be some kind-hearted people in Greenbridge to send such a lovely dress. When we go east we shall live there." That's all. Phoebe wears the dress yet. Mother made it over for her.

PHŒBE G. And am I really going to see it again?

DEBORAH. Phoebe, my dear, please take fifty dollars for your Home Missionary Society. If any one deserves it, they do.

DEBORAH H. Here is my sister.

(*Enter PHŒBE HOLLIS, c.*)

PHŒBE G. (*excitedly*). There it is! There it is! If any one had told me it would come back to Greenbridge!

DEBORAH. My other niece, Blanche.

(*PHŒBE G. runs and clasps young PHŒBE H. in her arms.*)

PHŒBE G. Welcome home again! How well you've worn! Oh, my dear, I'm glad it has been of use to you—the dress, I mean.

DEBORAH H. Phoebe, this is Aunt Deborah.

PHŒBE H. My aunt? A real aunt? Do you mean it?

(*DEBORAH kisses her.*)

PHŒBE G. Oh, call me aunt, too.

PHŒBE H. And we thought we were perfect strangers in Greenbridge. How lucky we are! And to think we just drifted here by chance.

DEBORAH. No, not chance, dear. Your Aunt Phoebe was right—it was destiny.

PHŒBE G. Destiny and the dimity gown, and the pocketbook.

DEBORAH. Yes. (*To PHŒBE G.*) I'm going to feel differently in the future, Phoebe, about pocketbooks.

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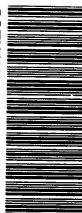
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